
ALEXITHYMIA, FACIAL EMOTION IDENTIFICATION AND SOCIAL INFERENCE IN ED PATIENTS: A CASE-CONTROL STUDY

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Introduction Alexythymia, reduced cognitive empathy and emotion awareness and understanding are present among individuals with Eating Disorders (EDs). Facial expression is a reliable marker of emotion and an important source of social information. Thus, the ability to judge facial expression is essential for successful interpersonal interactions.

Objectives To evaluate alexythymia, facial emotion identification and social inference abilities in a sample of ED patients, compared to a sample of patients with another psychiatric diagnosis and a group of healthy controls, matched by gender and age.

Aims To describe a specific pattern of emotional dysregulation in ED patients.

Methods ED patients and the Psychiatric Control Group are recruited at the Institute of Psychiatry in Novara, while healthy controls are recruited on a community basis. All patients and controls are females, aged 18-65. All patients are undergoing the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV -Patient version (SCID-I-P), healthy controls are administered the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV – Non Patient version (SCID-I-NP).

All subjects are undergoing the following: SCID-II, Eating Disorder Inventory - 3 (EDI-3), Binge Eating Scale (BES), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Symptom Checklist – 90 (SCL-90), Facial Emotion Identification Test (FEIT), The Awareness of Social Inference Test (TASIT), Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20).

Results The recruitment and analysis of the samples are ongoing. The ED sample is expected to show greater alexythymia and a poorer performance at FEIT and TASIT, compared to the control samples.

Conclusions Clinical implications will be discussed.